

# **KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

## **STAFF NOTE**

### **Review Item:**

Revisions to Kentucky's Accountability System

### **Applicable Statute or Regulation:**

KRS 158.6453, 703 KAR 5:020

### **History/Background:**

***Existing Policy.*** In 2004, the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) began to engage in deliberate conversations around moving the state assessment program forward in anticipation that assessment contracts would soon expire. A structure for guiding the conversation was the document titled "Seven Steps Forward in Assessment" that outlined a number of enhancements and future goals for the state assessment system. As the KBE listened to the field and policymakers and considered legal requirements in Kentucky statute and No Child Left Behind, new directions for the system emerged. The outcome of these multiple-year conversations and subsequent board decisions has been new assessment contracts that will continue the state assessment program.

Additionally, Senate Bill 130 added the ACT for students at grade 11 and optional WorkKeys assessments to the EXPLORE and PLAN readiness assessments included in the CATS assessment Request for Proposal (RFP). The bill also included requirements on accommodations, reporting, student interventions, cost, alignment studies and subsequent reduction of items on the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT), and technical advice. The new assessment contracts now serve as the vehicles to implement the decisions of the Kentucky Board of Education and actions of the 2006 Kentucky General Assembly that have enhanced the assessment program with several new components.

Since the inception of a state assessment and accountability program with the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), the accountability focus has remained primarily school-based with recognition and sanctions attached to school results. The KBE adopted a growth model with performance of schools serving as their own baseline. All students and thus all schools are expected to demonstrate improvement within the system.

The overriding goal of the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) is for all schools in Kentucky to reach Proficiency as defined by the KBE. The accountability system provides the mechanism for measuring this goal and thus provides feedback to schools on how they are progressing. Proficiency for a school is represented as an accountability index of 100 by 2014. The Kentucky Accountability Index includes both

academic and nonacademic measures. These multiple measures provide a “snapshot” of schools and communicate the importance of each measure in terms of resources and instructional programs.

**Policy Issue(s):**

Now that the new assessment components and timelines for their implementation are mostly in place, the important task becomes determining how the assessment components will be reflected in the accountability system. Adding components to the assessment system provides not only the opportunity to improve the measurement of school and student performance, but the ability to determine how assessment components become part of the calculation of the accountability index.

Since the state assessment and accountability system provides the means to report results on both state and federal performance targets and the consequences for not achieving goals, issues around effectively managing changes to the system become critical. As 2014 is now a mere eight years away, it is vital that during the process of system change, fairness, continuity, and stability are maintained as much as possible and that schools and districts are provided the direction and time necessary to adjust and modify their programs appropriately.

Most discussion questions have been focused on the new assessment components that could impact the accountability calculations:

- redesign of the testing format and structure;
- expansion of testing in reading and mathematics grades 3-8 to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements;
- reduction in norm-referenced testing at grades 3 and 9 to reduce testing redundancies in reading and mathematics;
- addition of readiness examinations at grade 8 (EXPLORE) and 10 (PLAN);
- requirement for ACT testing at grade 11 and optional WorkKeys assessments during high school; and
- creation of a new Individual Learning Plan that could be a nonacademic measure.

The discussions with stakeholders have centered on questions that broadly focus on the whole system with its three major areas that combine to create the composite Accountability Index: 1) Academic Index, 2) Nonacademic Index, and 3) the Norm-Referenced Test Index. Questions discussed have included:

1. How should KBE transition during this biennium to grow the system and implement change over time?
2. How should the ACT be included in the accountability index?
3. Should the percentage of accountability index derived from Reading and Mathematics at elementary and middle school levels increase due to annual testing in grades 3-8 or should the percentage remain the same using more measures?
4. Should all content areas maintain a similar emphasis in the accountability calculation?

5. Should the measurement of nonacademic factors and the methods used for data collection be modified? Should the Individual Learning Plan be a mechanism for evaluating nonacademic factors?
6. Should the weighting of the nonacademic factors (attendance, retention, dropout rate and transition to adult life) be changed?
7. Should a norm-referenced measure with national information be included in the accountability calculations at every level?

As these questions and others have entered the conversations with stakeholders, issues have emerged specific to the calculation of the accountability index at each grade span (Elementary, Middle and High School) with the greatest consensus around elementary and middle school issues and the least consensus around high school issues. The conversations have introduced several ideas that will require time in order to fully implement, the advice of the technical and psychometric communities, and the approval of the United States Department of Education if NCLB reporting and compliance are impacted. Some of the rich conversations are highlighted below.

#### Elementary and Middle School Conversation Highlights

- All content areas should be valued, but reading and mathematics could be emphasized more in the accountability index due to the annual testing in grades 3-8.
- The testing of every child in reading and mathematics each year in the elementary and middle school and a functioning, unique state student identifier will allow the tracking of student performance over time. This more longitudinal approach in the content areas that are tested annually could provide a mechanism to calculate a growth measure for reading and mathematics at the school level as student performance is evaluated annually. A growth measure might be included as an indicator of transition in the nonacademic area or added to a content area in the academic factors.
- The value of nonacademic factors of attendance and retention could be examined and consideration given to new measures or methods of calculation since current factors do not discriminate school performance effectively.
- The norm-referenced measure to be administered in the fall of 6<sup>th</sup> grade has been questioned by some members of the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council (SCAAC) due to testing students in the fall immediately after summer break and potential technical problems with reporting the scores from the middle school back to an elementary school for accountability purposes. This 6<sup>th</sup> grade norm-referenced measure might not be included in the elementary accountability calculation. Results from 6<sup>th</sup> grade could be combined with EXPLORE at grade 8 and included in middle school accountability or simply not included in accountability.
- The EXPLORE at grade 8 could be included as a measure of transition in the nonacademic factors.

### High School Conversation Highlights

- All content areas should be valued.
- The nonacademic factor of successful transition to adult life should be evaluated for effectiveness. Changes to the definition and data collection could be considered. The other factors of attendance, retention and dropout could also be examined and the relative emphasis considered.
- The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) might provide a mechanism to collect nonacademic data. Before inclusion into accountability, however, the ILP must connect to measures of transition to adult life and other identified indicators. In addition, a data collection process must be developed.
- The ACT could be included in both academic and nonacademic factors.
  - The composite score for ACT could be a transition indicator and included in the nonacademic factors.
  - The composite score for ACT could be included in a national or readiness index built off of national percentiles.
  - The performance on individual reading, mathematics and science items in the ACT assessments could contribute to the reading, mathematics and science scores in the academic index. In this scenario, data from ACT would be combined with data from the Kentucky Core Content Test to create the results for reading, mathematics and science.

Since reading, mathematics and science are NCLB requirements, the assessments and data must meet all federal requirements and receive US Department of Education approval for use in the system. The ACT will need to undergo an independent alignment to Kentucky's standards both in content and cognitive dimensions; the process for modifying the Kentucky Core Content Test based on the alignment studies and the data reporting methods and scale created to combine ACT and the Kentucky Core Content Test will require federal approval and technical psychometric oversight. Test administration and accommodation guidelines for ACT and the Kentucky Core Content Test will need to be examined and merged where possible.

Staff will bring forward possible accountability options through a PowerPoint presentation for KBE consideration and reactions at the August meeting and will continue to consult with advisory and stakeholder groups. Our plan is to introduce the issues at the August meeting and conduct further work during the fall and bring formal recommendations for revisions to the accountability system in October. The KBE will need to consider how new assessment components should impact changes to the accountability calculations and amend appropriate regulations that will define new decisions regarding accountability.

### **Impact on Getting to Proficiency:**

As Kentucky's assessment and accountability system transitions to incorporate new assessments and changes to the accountability program, an important consideration will

be how to build the system while allowing schools and districts the capacity to manage the change. Clear expectations are a key to focusing work toward school and student proficiency and reasonable timelines will enable schools and districts to implement change effectively.

**Contact Person:**

Pam Rogers, Associate Commissioner  
Office of Assessment and Accountability  
502-564-2256  
[pamela.rogers@education.ky.gov](mailto:pamela.rogers@education.ky.gov)

---

**Deputy Commissioner**

---

**Commissioner of Education**

**Date:**

August 2006

